

Psychology a science
as old as mankind
theology religion
essay



“ We can choose our sins but not their consequences,” is an ancient proverb. These words are most widely used in a spiritual context albeit in reality, they denote that we select our actions by free will without the ability to predict their outcome or impact on our life.

The proverb signifies that humans are prone to various vagaries, purely caused by mental processes. It is well known that every action is the culmination of a thought: We think first and then act accordingly, based on our knowledge, resources and circumstances prevalent at any particular time. That thoughts emerge from our brain is well known. But the complexities involved behind every thought and possibly related actions remains a mystery till date, despite every human effort to interpret these myriad processes.

To a great extent, humans, since ancient times, have comprehended and found cures for a plethora of ailments that plague the physical body- from simple wounds to life threatening viral contagion. Yet, no scientist or inventor has managed to successfully interpret the workings of the human thought chain. The brain is composed of brain cells and membranes- kept alive by an incessant supply of blood, oxygen and nutrients. It has also been established that various potent hormones in the brain are responsible for its functioning. That deficiencies or overages of some may result in behavioural anomalies, which are treated medically.

Despite, nobody has found the wonder key that would unravel mysteries associated with the sequences of human thoughts and behaviour till date.

Human Origins:

To understand psychology, let us examine the basis of human evolution: scientific, as propounded by Charles Darwin that we are all descendants of some esoteric, primordial apes or spiritual, contained in the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran- that we are progenies of Adam and Eve. Both concepts of evolution remain hotly debated.

Importance of Darwin's Evolution Theory and related research in Psychology:

Psychology of Primitive Humans:

If humans are indeed descendants of ancient apes, what factors made these primates different from other animals of that era? Obviously, humans are endowed with something exceptional other animals lack: the ability to think and behave accordingly. Scientists aver that primitive humans evolved some seven million years ago, as a distinct species of apes.

Primitive humans had simple needs: food and shelter. Basic understanding of how to procure these was their only requisite. While no records exist about how the primal man behaved, it is apparent they experienced fear- mainly from animals and creatures more powerful, loneliness- leading them to live in societies rather than isolation, anger and affection- an emotion intrinsic to social life. Above all, they possessed a unique trait: To dominate other creatures. This required them to harness natural resources to their advantage and gain the cutting edge that would eventually make them the dominant species on Planet Earth.

For obvious reasons, psychologists did not exist in that era but palaeontologists have tried to sequence the human thought process of primitive humans through the study of their artefacts including tools, skulls and climatic changes of that period.

Excavations of thousands of archaeological sites worldwide reveal, primitive humans began using tools and hunting equipment as early as some 2.6 million years ago, during the Early Stone Age (Palaeolithic). These included stone hammers and sharp stone flakes, among others: A clear indicator of their thought process led them to rely on implements that were almost indestructible and could vanquish any powerful animal, if deployed properly. Around 1.75 million years ago, they began making the first version of axes called Acheulean axes and larger cutting tools- once again pointing that primitive humans were dissatisfied with their earlier achievements and yearned for something more sophisticated- caused by the thought to improve their lifestyle and perhaps, excel.

As humans progressed, these simple tools began assuming more complex and practical forms such as basic shafts to hone spears, awns possibly used to cut animal hides for clothing and scraping tools to shape such hides, wood and stones, which are found to date some 200,000 years ago, or, the Medieval Stone Age (Mesolithic) - signifying that primitive man's chain of thought was more progressive.

Archaeological evidence from the Late Stone Age (Neolithic) reveals, humans had begun experimenting and using other raw material for their inventions such as durable remains of animals including antlers and horns, ivory tusks

and various forms of stones, found deeper in soil. Driving force behind this progress was of course- the infinite human thought process: the will to prevail over other creatures and the necessity to create basic gizmos that would aid this dominance.

From Stone Age till date:

Mankind evolved gradually but steadily with every millennium marking a milestone such as Agrarian Age, around 9500BC, when humans learned to domesticate animals and grow crops for food rather than forage, Copper Age, around 4000BC when humans discovered the metal and used it to their benefit, Iron Age (3000BC) and eventually, to rudimentary yet developed civilizations. This evolution stemmed from the human mind: the thought process culminating in action, aimed at attaining supremacy over nature, living creatures and inanimate elements and, over ages, achieved successfully.

Development of the Human Brain:

Primitive humans, by virtue of their intelligence over other creatures, were affected by several factors. Physiological and psychological changes in brain are believed to have occurred about 6 million years ago, when primates that would eventually evolve into humans, began walking upright rather than on all fours, unlike other variants of the genus. Brain size of early humans increased slightly during this era, as their intelligence grew and they began creating rudimentary tools.

Between 2million and 800, 000 years ago, primitive humans emerged across the globe, albeit with varying degrees of development. The need to adapt to

climatic changes, invent and discover implements for survival and develop further caused significant changes to the brain size. The reason: Larger brains are a prerequisite to processing greater amount of data and higher intelligence. Relying on fossilized skulls of primitive humans from various eras, scientists were able to conclusively deduce that brain size increased as human intelligence grew, while those of other animals remained somewhat consistent, till they became extinct or evolved into denizens we know now.

A clincher to this is: An average Chimpanzee brain weighs around 400gms while a normal brain of a modern human weighs a whopping 1.350gms. A modern human brain constitutes only two percent of the average body weight but accounts for 20 percent of oxygen supply to the body and requires 20 percent of the body's blood to remain functional.

The advantages of a larger brain, as explained by scientists are that it can store vast amounts of information, collect and process data within split seconds and deliver necessary impulses and reactions while devising or engaging in creative or destructive activities, of which no other species are capable on this planet.

Laboratory experiments prove that human brains have more white matter indicating it is connected to an intricate network of nerves and cells thus imparting a greater ability to process data while Chimpanzees have lesser white matter in their brains leading to lower connectivity to nerves and cells and a limited capacity to comprehend or process information.

These findings are essential to psychology today because a modern brain is capable of multi-dimensional though processes.

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Evolution of humans in spiritual context: (In chronological order):

Primitive Spirituality: Little is known about how and when primitive humans developed their belief in a supernatural power or a higher power. Ancient cave paintings and carvings indicate that primordial humans worshipped natural phenomenon and elements such as the Sun, Moon, lightning and thunder among others. Some such art also depicts humans with different physical features and robed in attire uncommon for the era. While research on these paintings and carvings are highly empirical and results, ambiguous, they do confirm that prehistoric man feared and revered these objects or humanoids.

Due to societal life, it was also essential from primitive humans to choose leaders for their group. To be a leader, primitive humans chose a compatriot who was endowed with exceptional brawn and knowledge- for example, a person who could guide them how or where to forage for food, lead them to safety or created a useful implement.

In both these cases, it is evident that psychology played a major role since complex thought procedures were involved.

Primitive humans evolved into well organized societies that transformed into ancient kingdoms. Technology and science developed concurrently, giving birth to newer creations, improvements on earlier inventions and sophisticated lifestyles.

Yet, no efforts were made by the now well evolved humans to determine what triggers the human thought process, the chain leading to action and its

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subsequent consequences. Myths and folklore emerged and primitive spirituality began developing into organized religions.

Organized religions, to a great extent, were the first attempt by humans to imbibe psychology into daily life, albeit, unwittingly.

Emergence of organized spirituality or religion:

Hinduism: Srimad Bhagwad Geeta (The Song Divine), believed to have originated around 3000BC, is said to be an excellent and the first recorded example of psychological counselling: The Pandava warrior Arjuna (counselee) , saddened at the prospect of slaying his cousins, uncles, teachers and friends and the imminent bloodshed during the epic Mahabharata war, wishes to abandon the war and expresses his thoughts to Lord Krishna (counsellor). Ancient Hindu texts do not define evolution of humans clearly.

Lord Krishna: Counsels Arjuna about the meaning of human life and its various aspects while encouraging Arjuna to perform his duty. This counselling includes in the Srimad Bhagwad Geeta relates to daily life, food, duties and rights as well and speaks about a Utopian state of mind wherein a person is immune to all attachments of human emotions (Sanskrit word: Stithaprajnya).

Judaism: The Noble Torah (Origin around 1500BC), an ancient version of the Old Testament (and also part of the Holy Bible) mentions Adam and Eve as the ancestors of humans in the Book of Genesis.

Christianity: The Holy Bible (Origin around 1500BC with Old Testament to 200AD): Genesis 1: 26 to 5: 5: Describes how Almighty Creator (God) created the Earth, living creatures, the universe and the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, whom He entrusted with the Garden of Eden with a warning: “ But the Lord God gave him this warning: (Genesis 2: 16): “ You may freely eat any fruit in the garden (Genesis 2: 17): except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die.”

These verses clearly mention ‘ knowledge, good, evil’ – some of the words that form basis of modern psychology.

Jesus Christ: An outstanding example of qualities that any psychological or psychiatric counsellor should possess. An embodiment of simplicity, Jesus Christ was astute in his judgement about human behaviour, its pros and cons, aptly analyzed human dilemmas while counselling accordingly, on basis of spirituality and understanding of a power greater than humans.

Islam: Al Quran Al Shareef: (Origin around 630AD)
Chapter 7, Verse 189: “ It is He who created you from one soul and created from it its mate that he might dwell in security with her. And when he covers her, she carries a light burden and continues therein. And when it becomes heavy, they both invoke Allah , their Lord, “ If You should give us a good child, we will surely be among the grateful.” (Surat Al-‘ A`rÄ)f). This verse refers to Adam and Hawwa (the Arabic pronunciation of Eve.)

The Al Quran Al Shareef also lays emphasis on human behaviour in this verse through words such as the ‘ soul’ (inner self), ‘ security’ and ‘ grateful’- all vital in modern psychology.

Prophet Mohammad (PBUH): This great founder of Islam is the pioneer of what is now recognized as Racial Psychology. The Arab world, during those years, was home to people from different races, from Far East Asia to Europe, Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, who resided there as traders, soldiers or slaves and embraced Islam. The Islamic worship (Namaz or Salaah) united all Muslims regardless of their race, creed, nationality and colour for a common purpose- to respect Almighty Allah, in whose eyes, all humans are equal and dissolving any divisions based on earthly features such as wealth, might or race.

(Though the Noble Torah, the Holy Bible and the Al Quran Al Sharif texts agree on some principles about human creation (male and female) by a divine power, a few differences exist in their interpretations and narrations, within their respective faiths.)

Significance of Spiritual Teachings in psychology then and now:

Psychology, in spiritual context of the Al Quran Al Shareef, the Holy Bible, the Noble Torah and Srimad Bhagwad Geeta are primarily based on human behaviour or psychology. They contain detailed instructions on how to aim for a perfect life that is free from irrational fear, proper social behaviour, ties with family and brotherhood, duties towards mankind and obeisance to a power greater than humans-God- by whatever name we choose to describe the Creator, eliminating a human's most basic fear of death. This holds true for most faiths and their texts as well. Invariably, all spiritual texts lay great emphasis on mental well-being of humans by defining certain standards for behaviour.

Spiritual or religious texts also define the concept of ' Sin'- or actions that contravene ideal life, warning about dire consequences of indulging in such acts. It's a well known fact today that a ' sinful' life- which can be defined as a flagrant violation of well established societal and spiritual tenets, can have disastrous circumstances on one's life and those around them.

Committing a crime (sin) renders one liable to prosecution under the law and consequential punishments, causing irreparable psychological harm to culprits and their family members.

Addiction to alcohol or narcotics and psychotropic substances, also deemed a sin, has disastrous effects on an individual's behaviour while directly impacting the lives of their families, colleagues and the society.

Modern day psychologists agree that genuine spirituality (not religious rituals performed without faith in a higher power), play a major role in the mental well-being of humans, since it helps people to answer questions that human reasoning or science cannot explain. On the flip side, an excessive inclination towards religious beliefs and blind faith can lead to addictive behaviour including fanaticism.

The Birth of Psychology:

While spiritual texts offered excellent guidelines about living a near Utopian life by preaching how to control one's behaviour, they contained negligible information or no explanation about what influences the human thought chain and resultant actions. For example, religious texts caution humans against " sins" but do not explain the human thought process leading to a " sinful" act. This, apparently, had to be entrusted to humans.

And humans did make efforts to unravel the mysteries of their thought process and resultant actions. Early philosophers, thinkers and scientists, intrigued at the complexities of human thoughts and actions, embarked on long, often painstaking and sometimes fruitless endeavour to solve this enigma. Centuries of work, wrong perceptions, accidental discoveries, unwarranted ridicule and astute research mark this ongoing, unending journey that led to the evolution of psychology, from ancient times to the latest developments of today's modern world.

Today, psychology aids millions of people worldwide to live a better life by helping them understand various facets of their behaviour. Psychology is helping the corporate world reap larger profits by helping select workers with

the desired qualities. Psychology joins ranks with law enforcement officers to make this world a better, safer place by identifying criminal traits of individuals. Psychology goes online by assuming ' avatar' (cyber images) created by individuals of how they perceive themselves. Hence, psychology is the true " biological mother" of all inventions, either propelled by necessity or ego.

Ends.